

Snow again this weekend, thankfully only flurries. It was a record-setting winter with over 100 inches of snow, including a 20 inch blizzard February 5 to 6.

And I have to thank our plow drivers for their work. Snowplowing is hard, physical work. And it requires long hours, especially when it seems to snow every couple days. They deserve an attaboy for their work this winter.

Of course, the snow tried everyone's patience. Slow driving and accidents make even easy commutes long and tiring. And then to shovel out the driveway yet again. I appreciate the public's putting up with the winter. It was tough on everyone, so an attaboy for all of you too.

With double the average snowfall this winter, the city was over budget. But by how much takes a bit of estimation. The city streamlined its accounting a few years ago, so there is not a separate category for Snow Removal. It is part of Street Maintenance, along with potholes, patches, seal-coating, and all the rest. So to get a handle on the fiscal impact of the record-setting winter means pulling individual invoices and some estimation.

Labor: Wages are the greatest expense for snow removal. For the Public Works Department, who does the plowing, wages (including taxes and retirement benefits) totaled \$74,000. This is over double the \$36,000 in wages for the 2006-2007 season.

I do need to elaborate on Public Works wages being double those of last year. During the winter of 2006-2007, employees had time between snowfalls to perform other work such as tree trimming, installing road signs, some minor remodeling, equipment maintenance and tune-ups, and similar duties. So much of the additional hours did not come at the expense of the budget, rather it came at the expense of other services. Overtime, however, was about \$7,500. And some of those other duties cannot be ignored for the year; they will need to be picked up in the spring or summer.

This is hourly wages only; it does not include an estimate of the hours by the salaried Public Works Superintendent. It also does not include wages of any other city department for snow removal. The Water & Light Utility had over \$6,000 in snow removal wages. This was mostly cleaning out snow around fire hydrants.

It also does not include the expense of Police, Ambulance, or Fire Departments which responded to accidents and emergencies. On a side note, the Police Department purchased an SUV from Symdon Chevrolet this winter. This was a budgeted expense, but the timing was pure luck. Right after its delivery, the lights and other equipment were actually being installed the evening of February 5 as the blizzard started; thank you, Bob Barker. One of the reasons for the department's purchase of a four-wheel-drive vehicle was for responding during snow conditions. It proved itself immediately.

Trucks: Truck maintenance and repairs, fuel, and sand and salt are also winter expenses. In 2006-2007 these were just under \$20,000. Again, these more than doubled, with 2007-2008 running about \$44,000 (with a few late bills still anticipated).

Plowing is tough on the trucks. In addition to typical maintenance with hydraulic lines and blades, we had a ram break, a number of snapped center bolts, and broken springs on all the trucks. The three plow trucks are 1992, 1994, and 1995 trucks. So repairs are becoming more frequent, and some replacement parts are harder to find.

Before this back-breaking winter, the city did budget to purchase a new plow truck in 2008. Due to the age of the fleet and the repairs this winter, in April the city instead approved a lease-to-purchase arrangement to acquire two new trucks.

Paying for the trucks over five years was seen as a cost effective means of acquiring new trucks without increasing the budget. Although the payments would initially be within the approved budget, during the third year the city would have needed to budget for the second truck. With the current trucks roughly the same age, it is likely the city would have been budgeting for another new truck within a couple years anyway.

The price is set under a negotiated government rate, so it is a very good price. And the mark-up for the lease is equal to a very reasonable effective interest rate of 3.3%. The Public Works Department will take delivery in the fall.

Salt: Rock County has a sand and salt bunker just north of Evansville. In the past, the city has purchased its sand and salt materials directly from the county. This has been a cost effective arrangement since the county purchases materials in much greater quantities than the city would, resulting in cost savings. It has also saved the city from having to build or maintain a shed of its own.

However, with the record-breaking snowfall, the county found itself worried about running short of sand and salt. Since the first of the year, the county no longer allowed the city to purchase from its depleted stockpiles. And the law of supply and demand saw salt prices more than double in the upper midwest. The city turned to private sources to purchase sand and tried to do without salt. The Public Works Department was able to purchase some salt from the Cities of Beloit and Monroe late in the year.

Over the summer, the city will be exploring a few options to reduce the risk of finding itself without salt in future winters.

Assistance: Under Presidential Emergency FEMA-3285, the city is eligible to recoup a portion of the snow removal costs due to the February 5-6 blizzard. Disaster aid will cover equipment usage, contracts, and personnel overtime for a 48-hour period. The costs will be covered 75% by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, 12.5% by the state, and 12.5% locally.

The city has already submitted its request for public assistance and associated paperwork. Total eligible expenses for the city were just over \$12,000. This included significant overtime as well as contract snow removal during the 48 hours from February 6 to 7.

Next Steps: With double the average snowfall, winter expenses more than doubled this year. After the final numbers with FEMA are known, and after a couple late invoices are received, the city will consider a budget amendment to cover the over-budget expenses of a record-setting winter. One reason the city maintains reserves funds is as a rainy day (or snowy day) fund. And this year fits the need. The city will also be updating its aging plow trucks and looking at methods to ensure access to salt reserves.

And, hopefully, next winter will be closer to the norm.